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SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE AMBASSADORS ON SOMALIA AND SUDAN

REF: A. 2008 ADDIS ABABA 1065
[1](#)B. ADDIS ABABA 698

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary. Ambassadors from Arab League countries raised with the U.S. Ambassador during their regular gatherings, questions about the new Administration in the context of U.S. policy towards Somalia. The Arab Ambassadors pressed the Ambassador on U.S. support for the new Transitional Federal Government (TFG) leader, Sheikh Sharif. The Ambassadors underscored that Sharif may be the last chance for peace in Somalia, and urged the United States to support Sharif, even if he is in dialogue with "terrorists." The Arab Ambassadors believed that such dialogue was a necessary measure to end the violence in Somalia. The Arab Ambassadors also complained bitterly about Ethiopia's perceived "anti-Arab" posture and that Ethiopia must change its attitude or risk alienating the large Muslim population in Ethiopia and heavy Arab investments in Ethiopia's public sector. End Summary.

Somalia: The Final Chance

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Ambassadors from Arab League countries (Sudan, Libya, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Palestine, and the Arab League, etc.) hosted the Ambassador for a regular luncheon meeting on March 24. The meeting was part of a regular dialogue initiated by the U.S. and Yemeni Ambassadors as a means to enhance mutual understanding. In previous meetings, the Arab Ambassadors took the opportunity to air their complaints about U.S. policy, Muslim tensions in Africa, and Ethiopia-Arab tensions (REFTELS). The Arab Ambassadors pressed the Ambassador on U.S. support for newly selected TFG leader Sheikh Sharif, who they noted was previously opposed by the United States when he was a leader of the Islamic Courts. The Ambassador noted Embassy Nairobi's public statement welcoming Sheikh Sharif as the new TFG leader. The Ambassador noted that Washington supported the TFG and its leadership.

[1](#)3. (S/NF) The Arab Ambassadors all stated emphatically that Sharif could be the best, and possibly final, chance at bringing peace to Somalia. They cautioned the U.S. Ambassador that U.S. support is important and must continue even if Sheikh Sharif engages in dialogue with extremists and known terrorists. Sharif may be the only person able to persuade such groups to end the violence, they insisted. The U.S. Ambassador cautioned the group that such dialogue can be counter productive and reminded them that individuals like Muktar Robow are on international terrorist lists. The

Egyptian, Sudanese, and Libyan Ambassadors urged the U.S. not to continue air strikes in Somalia against terrorist targets. They cautioned that with a new administration there should be a new outreach to Muslims, and that military strikes do not promote understanding.

14. (S/NF) The U.S. Ambassador underscored that the election of a new U.S. president always offers new approaches and new ideas to resolution of problems and that we must all focus, for now, in supporting the TFG, and efforts by the African Union because the alternative is violence in Somalia. In this context, the U.S. Ambassador urged the Arab Ambassadors to demonstrate their support for the TFG by paying for salaries of the TFG troops being trained by Ethiopia, and others. The United States, the Ambassador noted, had already contributed over 180 million USD in support of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and humanitarian support for the people of Somalia, and asked the Arab Ambassadors to contribute as well.

Ethiopian-Arab Tensions

15. (S/NF) The Egyptian Ambassador articulated the deep frustration with Ethiopia. The Prime Minister and Foreign Minister have yet to meet with the Arab Ambassadors, especially to explain why Ethiopia severed relations with Qatar over a year ago. All of the Ambassadors complained that while the Prime Minister meets with the European and even Asian Ambassadors, he has yet to meet with the Arabs. The U.S. Ambassador noted that he personally interceded on

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behalf of the Arab Ambassadors in securing approval from Prime Minister Meles and Foreign Minister Seyoum to meet privately with the Arab Ambassadors in the near future, and that the Arab group should coordinate a time. The Arab Ambassadors expressed frustration with the Ethiopians to the point that the Saudi Ambassador said the Ethiopians know where they are, and they can arrange the meeting if they are serious. The Arab Ambassadors noted that the Ethiopians need to do a better job cultivating Arab states because of the high Muslim population in Ethiopia, and the heavy Arab investment in Ethiopia.

16. (S/NF) The Egyptian Ambassador raised the lack of progress in finalizing a Nile River Basin Agreement, warning that if it is not resolved it could lead to unnecessary tensions between Egypt and the African states. The Arab Ambassadors interestingly noted that Sudan was the main obstacle, though Ethiopia was also a blockage.

Sudan: Support Article 16

17. (S/NF) The Arab Ambassadors urged Washington to support the African Union position of seeking a one year delay to the ICC arrest warrant for Sudanese President Bashir. The Ambassadors said pushing for an Article 16 deferral at the United Nations would allow this highly contentious issue to be kicked down the road, and avoid creating problems which could make the Sudan situation more dangerous.

Comment

18. (S/NF) The Arab League Ambassadors meeting has been an extremely useful exchange in allowing the U.S. Ambassador to raise issues of concern on regional, African Union, and Ethiopian domestic and foreign issues. The Arab Ambassadors find the meetings important since there are few mechanisms available for them to meet with their European and North American counterparts except at receptions. End Comment.
YAMAMOTO